Death to Dust: What Happens to Dead Bodies, by Kenneth V. Iserson, MD. Tucson, Ariz: Galen Press, Ltd, 1994; 709 pp.

I was prepared not to like this book. Indeed, as a behavioral pediatrician who has worked with children who have suffered loss, as well as with children who have a chronic or terminal illness themselves, I take my reading on issues about death and dying very seriously. Everything about *Death to Dust*, when I first glanced at the book jacket, made me not want to like it: the cover illustrations look garish, the excerpted table of contents touts the sensational and horrific, and some of the endorsement quotes are truly silly.

Despite the author's claim that at least one of the goals of the book is to foster organ transplantation by demystifying the process, I wasn't prepared to buy any of it. For about 2 months the book sat on my desk, and I wondered why I had agreed to do a review. As the deadline (no pun intended) drew too close for comfort, I finally started reading. What a surprise!

My plan had been to skim a few sections and then pan the book. But, like the 78-year-old woman described in one of the book jacket blurbs, I just couldn't put it down. Unlike that lady, though, I didn't find myself giggling, but rather, fascinated. The author's style is straightforward, the chapters are packed with information, and even the macabre is discussed with such clarity and succinctness that the reader comes away with new understanding about some of the most troubling customs associated with the rituals of death.

The book has an introduction, ("Why This Book?"), 13 chapters, a glossary, and 10 appendices. The chapters are composed of commonly asked questions that most of us "sort of" know the answer to but really don't. For example: Who was buried alive intentionally? Can I donate blood after death? What happens if they cannot identify my body? Can all bodies be embalmed? What are religious and legal attitudes toward cryonics? Can I be buried

in foreign soil? How were corpses supposed to help or harm the living? Who gets to "lie in state"? Who gets a parade? Who owns my body after death?

Less sensational, but highly informative, are those segments devoted to issues of organ and tissue donation, including the organ/tissue donor card (imprinted on the back flap) that can be photocopied for distribution. After reading the chapter, "Help for the Living: Organ, Tissue and Whole Body Donation," few could argue that there is a need to be met and that the act of giving interferes little with the processes of memorialization and burial. Having this information should make it easier for physicians to encourage their patients to consider donation and, most importantly, to discuss their intentions with family members. After all, it's the family, not the person, who will be in a position to ensure the intention is realized when the individual can no longer speak for him- or herself.

The author, Kenneth V. Iserson, MD, is a professor of surgery and the director of the Arizona Bioethics Program at the University of Arizona Health Sciences Center in Tucson. His amazing book is truly worth reading. But be warned: although he does a remarkably good job of addressing just about every one of the almost 250 questions he poses about death, dying, bodies, and funerals, he does not really answer the very first question: "Why do people die?" We are treated to some traditional Fijian lore, an answer from the Navajo, and a bit of Judaic legend, but, not unexpectedly, this is one question to which Dr. Iserson did not quite find—for me, anyway—a fully satisfactory reply.

OLLEJANE Z. SAHLER, MD
DIRECTOR OF EDUCATION
AMERICAN ACADEMY OF PEDIATRICS
ELK GROVE VILLAGE, ILLINOIS